

VZCZCXRO0533

PP RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK

DE RUEHGB #0856/01 0801505

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P 201505Z MAR 08

FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6359

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000856

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E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREZ](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: PRT TEAM LEADERS CONFERENCE - LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE TEAM LEADER PERSPECTIVE

¶1. On March 3 and 4, the embassy's Office of Provincial Affairs (OPA) hosted the second quarterly Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Team Leaders Conference in Baghdad. The conference details are found in SEPTEL. Within the body of the conference, however, a separate closed-door session was held in an environment where team leaders could freely discuss lessons learned in their respective provinces, and to share their recommendations on how the increase the opportunities of success for PRTs during the rest of 2008. This cable covers the most salient points and discussions of this special session.

SOFT POWER SOLUTIONS, MILITARY, AND TEAM DYNAMICS

¶2. The Team Leader for PRT Muthanna opened the session by describing his province, about the size of Maine, as one of the largest in Iraq, but with one of the smallest population bases of about 700,000 inhabitants. Characterized as heavily tribal influenced and one of the poorest provinces, the Team Leader discussed his quote Soft Power Solution unquote along with the team mantra, Waging Peace Together. The key to PRT success: setting up the PRT in Working Groups in order to arrive to collective solutions and courses of actions, and making wide use of QRF for targeted projects that would have the most impact, such as water distribution and veterinarian services. The response from civil society, especially from the sheikhs and even from children, has been overwhelming and has validated the approach by this team.

¶3. The Team Leader for PRT Diyala offered a similar team dynamic but in a vastly different operating environment. He described the province dominated by the Sunnis with a population of about 1.6 million inhabitants. Most recently, the province experienced significant kinetic operations by MNF-I and Iraqi forces. The governor, as explained by the Team Leader, has been the target of at least eight attempts on his life during the past year, further underscoring the special challenges faced in Diyala. Despite these security issues, the PRT has managed to set up temporary operations in the government center, staying there at least five nights per week to work as closely as possible to their Iraqi counterparts. This presence, the team leader pointed out, is possible only through the support of the US military that is responsible for all their ground movements.

¶4. Similar to the working groups for Muthanna, PRT Diyala has formed themselves into six subgroups covering areas such as governance, infrastructure, economics, and public health. Teamwork at the brigade level, the team leader explained, is the only way the team can function in the province, and a solid working relationship between the team and the military is absolutely essential. The province was further described as Iowa cornfields to the north, with ghost towns dominating the south. This environment creates its own set of challenges as the PRT pushes to extend its reach away from the government center and to the province outskirts through the formation of small, temporary satellite offices. This concept has proven to be the only viable means to reach local government and sub-provincial population centers, and can be replicated in other

provinces as a force multiplier to reach beyond the government center. Again, this success is possible only through the coordination and cooperation of the US military.

¶ 15. The last team leader, from ePRT Baghdad 2, offered yet another perspective of the PRT world. Centered in a densely populated section of Baghdad, with a population of about 2 million persons, the team leader described his zone as the land of CERP, with QRF serving as a vital follow-on fund source. His typical programs covered education, health, youth and sports, agriculture, and trash mitigation. Other key activities in this ePRT zone included small business training, trade shows, a farming cooperative, and conflict mitigation. An example of the latter included an Iftar event sponsored by the ePRT for local leaders and civil society.

¶ 16. The team leader found that micro purchases were both an invaluable resources as well as one of his biggest challenges, as the requisite documentation and oversight procedures required significant team attention. Nevertheless, the above programs, with additional emphasis on employment generation and job placement, kept the ePRT fully occupied in areas that are essential to that section of Baghdad. Additional discussion on budget execution showed that although the municipal staffs have received training and are trying to spend their funds, many skill gaps still exist that need to be filled in order for the system to properly function. The team leader also stated that the system must remain fully transparent in order for his section of Baghdad to progress to a higher level of competency and efficiency.

SEEKING SOLUTION THAT CROSS PROVINCES

¶ 17. The open forum that followed the presentations revealed some keen

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insights as well as supported the theme for State and military mutual support. Part of the discussion centered on the lengthy common border that Iraq shares with its neighbors, and understanding the reality that traditional trade partners will likely continue despite past or current political tensions. Given that reality, the capacity to conduct legitimate trade remains a valid concern and should be supported. In some areas, the aftermath of kinetic operations was followed by the realization that some areas lacked a history of U.S.-funded governance programs, leaving such places at a disadvantage. Diyala, for example, was impacted in this manner, yet the team has strived to establish a strong relationship with the provincial government, and sought inventive ways to make up for lost time. Finally, the advantages of working directly with the U.S. military battalions, and the military reliance in some cases on the ePRT to support their strategic planning process, provided yet another example of the mutual coexistence between State and US military units.

COMMENT

¶ 18. Despite packing three days worth of meetings into two, OPA decided that the team leaders needed time together to discuss common issues, learn about successes and mistakes, and forge new alliances needed in this unique working environment. This special session was worth the effort, and will certainly be repeated in the next Team Leaders conference.

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